



Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools

September 2011

An e-newsletter from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Community Learning and Partnerships Team
to promote family-school-community partnerships for children's learning

Ways to Create a Welcoming School Environment

Wisconsin DPI VISTA and AmeriCorps volunteers have been working to make schools welcoming places to families. They work in schools and community sites around the state to strengthen student learning and family-school-community partnerships. For more great ideas, read the [VISTA newsletters](#) and the [AmeriCorps newsletters](#).

At Grove Elementary in Wisconsin Rapids, **Jenne Orcutt** worked with students to create a "Welcome to Grove" movie. Students wrote, appeared in, and produced the film. Final copies will be distributed to new families to welcome them to the school.

Juanita Peck worked with UW-Stout students to develop, administer, and analyze family and staff surveys of the Altoona School District. Survey results will gauge community opinion about the school district, including how welcoming schools are. Future surveys are planned for community residents without children currently in school, as well as businesses and community agencies, using feedback from focus groups to develop survey questions.

Sun Prairie High School featured a Back-to-School Night on Sept. 8. Parents followed their child's schedule to each eight-minute class, meeting teachers and hearing about the curriculum. Parents were also invited to share with teachers how their teen learns best. The evening was a chance for parents to "put a face with the name" of their students' teachers.

Visit [Promising Practices](#) at the National Network of Partnership Schools for over 600 good ideas that link family and community involvement linked to school improvement and student success.

Lessons Learned from Urban Charter Schools

Schools would do better to emphasize family engagement *strategies* v. *activities*, according to an article in the Spring/Summer 2011 School Community Journal. Researchers exploring family involvement in urban charter schools found that when parents and staff spent more time and effort on *how* the school involved families v. *what* they did with families, engagement benefitted. Many of the lessons learned can be used by any school.

For example,

- **Schools helped parents with the basics**, offering GED, English language, college-credit, and parenting classes for parents after school hours. One school held discussions on qualifying for home loans to help parents move toward home ownership. Another school held a book study, conducted in Hmong, Spanish, and English for parents to learn parenting techniques.

- **Schools achieved 100% attendance rates** at parent-teacher conferences not only by offering the standard conferences during the day, but also by conducting them by phone, during home visits, and at night. Schools also offered incentives (i.e., a drawing for prizes) for parent attendance.
- **Schools used technology** to reach families, sending out e-blasts, weekly school newsletters (published in up to six languages), and AllCall messages in families' home languages.
- **Schools focused on increasing parents' comfort level** and sense of efficacy with the school, offering brochures and monthly workshops on how to get involved, how to help children learn at home, and how to engage in school decision-making.

The article cites one study that found low-income parents who are initially consumed by trying to make a living, in appreciation become involved any way they can when their children do well in school. Good schooling begets parent involvement, the study concluded. Read more about ***Parent Involvement in Urban Charter Schools: New Strategies for Increasing Participation*** (p. 71) at http://www.adi.org/journal/resources/2011ss_SCJ.pdf.

Family Engagement = Community Support for Families

Don't just "incentivize" families to lure them into schools. Collaborate with educators and community organizations committed to families so parents *can* be involved in children's learning. Watch nationally-respected partnership advocate Karen Mapp talk about the need for communities to build dynamic, cradle-to-career relationships that support families' desire to help children succeed in and beyond school.

A short video clip of her remarks at the November 2010 National Policy Forum on Family, School, and Community Engagement in Washington, D.C. – along with many other interesting panelists – is at http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement_forum/highlights.html.

Common Core Standards: Parents Guide to Student Success

The Parents Guide to Student Success was developed by the National PTA in response to the Common Core Standards in English language, arts and mathematics that Wisconsin – and over 40 other states -- have adopted. Teachers, parents, education experts, and others from across the country collaborated to create the document.

The standards provide clear, consistent expectations for what students should learn at each grade to be prepared for college and career. The guide explains to parents:

- ➡ Key items that children should be learning in English language, arts and mathematics in each grade, once the standards are fully implemented.
- ➡ Activities that parents can do at home to support their child's learning.
- ➡ Methods for helping parents build stronger relationships with their child's teacher.
- ➡ Tips for planning for college and career.

View the guide at the PTA website: <http://www.pta.org/4446.htm>.

What will YOU Do to Advance Partnerships this Year?

Participants at the "Beyond Random Acts of Partnership Conference" March 23 in Milwaukee were asked to write down specific actions they would take to make a difference in family-school-community partnerships in their school. Each person jotted their commitment and their name and address on a postcard, now being mailed back to them as a gentle reminder of their promise to move partnerships forward, one person at a time.

Here are just a few of the responses from parents, teachers, administrators, and other school staff attending the conference. "I will....."

- ☒ Get to know the name of every student and parent at my location.
- ☒ Send home three positive notes about students every week.
- ☒ Re-introduce myself to the administrators and staff of my home district.
- ☒ Hold monthly Parent Talks with representatives of school, PTA, churches, and community.
- ☒ Do more home visits and create a "Family of the Month" school bulletin board.
- ☒ Greet with a smile every parent, grandparent, and family member who enters my building.
- ☒ Make more contacts with the families who do NOT come to school events.
- ☒ Learn about and connect to families' cultures to establish trusting relationships.
- ☒ Be a voice for other parents and tell them about upcoming events at the school.
- ☒ Go the extra mile in reaching out to families by mail, e-mail, text, online, Facebook, Twitter, and home visits.
- ☒ Work with parents and school staff to develop a parent center in our school.
- ☒ Talk with my principal about implementing a monthly "Coffee Talk" with parents, displaying a parent suggestion box at school, and starting a Parent Book Club.
- ☒ Work with the principal to re-build our PTO program.
- ☒ Find a way to encourage five parents to commit to serving on the parent committee and attend regular meetings.

What specific actions will you take to build partnerships at your school this year, one person at a time??

.....

Newsletter developed by DPI staff: **Ruth Anne Landsverk**, Partnerships Coordinator; **Jane Grinde**, Team Director; **Betsy Prueter**, Project Coordinator; **Katherine Foster**, VISTA Leader; and **Laura Paella**, Office Associate.

The **Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools** is a monthly newsletter of news, events, research, and promising practices to keep your school, district, or organization focused and moving forward on family-school-community partnerships for children's learning. You are receiving this e-brief because of your involvement in a partnership-related event or initiative sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). **If you prefer NOT to receive this online newsletter, please reply to this email with the subject line: "Remove from list."**

Your comments, ideas, and stories are vital to this newsletter. Please tell us your achievements in promoting children's learning with families and community members, as well as your challenges and questions. Partnership practitioners learn most from each other, so *let's hear from you!*